TELEVISION REVIEWS

Jack

(Wed. (17), 9-11 p.m., CBS-TV)

Taped by CBS Entertainment Prods. Exec producer, Peter Davis; producers-writers, Peter Davis, Nick Davis; co-producer, Tom Haneke; director, Nick Davis; music, Adam Gyettel.

Stitching together miles of tapes, newsreels, TV films and home movies about John Kennedy, and playing them while voices of family, friends and contemporaries describe the actions, should result in a choice experience. But while the assemblage resurrects JFK's vigor, it also pokes into tabloid corners; one sleazy inclusion jars the otherwise fond tribute.

The Kennedys, long surefire telefare, provide fodder for the sweeps month as some of Jack Kennedy's pals hand down opinions on him and his circle. Mostly, the voiceovers are informative and helpful; some are admiring, others suggest plain ol' pettiness.

Exec producer Peter Davis, a friend of the Kennedy family, had access to footage others might not be able to reach, but this is no all-glow Kennedy clambake. A woman claims he had an innate snobbery, while another describes him as a chauvinist.

As the camera pans over the Lincoln Bedroom, "Susannah M." brags that she and JFK had a "love affair." Miss "M." may help CBS in the sweeps, but she does nothing for the stature of the docu.

Observing JFK campaigning — from his first street hikes to a seg that suggests Nixon didn't don makeup for that first debate because Kennedy declined any — reveals how dedicated JFK was. The first president to use TV comfortably, as FDR once used radio, Kennedy knew his strengths, and they shine in Davis' spec.

Selected moments in Jackie Kennedy's married life are less than flattering. On viewing the film "PT 109," she reportedly commented, "Now he's going to be trying to act like Cliff Robertson all the time!" Reserved, she declined to say for the cameras that she loved JFK; choice of such clips (same one appeared in HBO's 1988 "JFK: In His Own Words," replayed on PBS Monday) smack of editorializing.

Among the choice items is a clip of press secretary Pierre Salinger talking about the Bay of Pigs.

According to the docu, Kennedy got bum advice from the military brass, and, after Castro wiped out the brigade in Cuba, the commander in chief painfully does some explaining at a press conference.

Robert Kennedy is all but ignored, daughter Caroline is a tag-along, and program skips the Dallas horror.

Producers-writers Peter Davis and Nick Davis have supplied one more look at the life of the 35th president. Maybe someone better start researching McKinley or Harding; the JFK retrospectives need a rest. **—Tony Scott**